



Back  
To  
School

Parent Kit

# 11 Things Your Elementary Student Needs From You

**By Heather Stoll**

It's time to go back to school! Whether this is your child's very first day of elementary school or their last first day, it's natural to feel both excitement and apprehension. You have purchased school supplies, filled their pencil case, removed the tags from the new backpack, and probably planned that first day of school outfit. It seems like your child has everything they need to enjoy a successful year.

But what about you? Have you prepared?

To successfully navigate elementary school, your student needs more than just new pencils and a snazzy backpack. Your child actually needs at least 11 things from you!

## **STRUCTURE**

Everything changes for the family when school starts. Schedules, homework, activities, practices, and commitments clamor for time on the calendar and threaten the family rhythm.

When everything gets busy around them, your child needs to know that some things stay the same. Family dinner, bedtime routines, family worship attendance, chores, and technology limits create a structure that provides a steady framework for their life.

## **CONSISTENCY**

In a world marked by extremes—and extreme busyness—consistency is a difficult standard to maintain. However, consistency is not about managing your schedule or waking up earlier to get everything done.

Consistency comes from the inside, rooted in the center of who you are and how you parent. It is a steadiness that refuses to over-react to elementary school meltdowns and peer parent pressure and holds to the values, goals, and priorities of your family. It is also reflected in a consistent adherence to family rules and boundaries, including bedtimes, technology limits, and chores and responsibilities.

## **AFFIRMATION**

Everyone wants to feel (and be told) they are loved and valued. Affirmation is verbal confirmation that your child is loved, smart, creative, helpful, funny, and hard-working. It should be directed toward their identity, personality, and things within their control (effort, kindness, etc.).

Affirmation is not excessive praise for everyday activities or an indulgent focus on accomplishments. It does not shield your child from consequences or remove the sting of failure. Affirmation builds self-confidence and independence rooted in reality and prepares them to face challenges in the future.



## **ENCOURAGEMENT**

Encouragement applies affirmation to everyday life. It builds on their identity and propels them to action. Encouragement helps your child try something new, join a club or sport, work towards an academic goal, or embrace a new friend. Encouragement tells them to keep trying when things get hard, provides comfort when they encounter failure, and cheers on the sideline whether they win or lose.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

Engaged parents pay attention. They notice behaviors, eating habits, moods, grades, friend groups, and technology use. They ask specific questions and listen to the answers. Engagement is NOT management. It is participating in a relationship with your student in which you invest time and attention. Engagement communicates interest and requires time and creativity. It usually does not involve technology.

## **INVOLVEMENT**

Involvement puts feet to engagement. Involvement means you show up. Your child will tell you that you don't have to come or it doesn't matter if you attend or someone else's parent can drive them. Involvement matters. There is no substitute for being there. It communicates that you care about them and what they do is important to you.

## **PRIORITY**

Intentionality is a popular concept in parenting—and it is great to be intentional. However, you can be intentional to schedule time with your child each month and miss every family dinner or sporting event. You can be intentional to lead a family devotion each morning, but not make time for an impromptu ice cream date. Priorities are reflected in your calendar, your bank account, and your to-do list. Does your elementary student have a place there?

## **TIME TO REST**

Our world is busy, and there is an immense amount of pressure to join the race. Your elementary child can join clubs and teams, take lessons, sign up for activities and programs, and participate in church and school events. Before you know it, they have an obligation every night of the week. Do you know what your elementary student needs from you? Time to rest.

Elementary children need sleep and rest and, as a parent, it is your job to set boundaries and say no—even if it means swimming upstream in a sea of peer parent pressure.

## **TIME TO PLAY**

In the race to rear a tech-savvy, well-rounded, athletic genius, a parent can function more like an executive assistant, managing calendars and appointments and uniforms. One of the best ways to prepare your child for success is to give them space to be a kid.

Let them play a sport, but also let them play in the yard. Pay for art lessons, but buy them a box of chalk and send them to the driveway. Sign them up for STEM club, but dump all of the Lego's in the middle of the floor and build something together. Curiosity and creativity and ingenuity are cultivated through play. Give your child (and yourself) a wonderful gift. Give them time to play.

### **A SAFE PLACE**

Today's world is a tough place. From mass shootings to weather disasters, there is always a tragedy occurring somewhere. It's easy for your student to become fearful, anxious, and unsure about the world we live in.

Home needs to be a safe place--physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. It needs to provide a reprieve from the world and a space to laugh and play and rest.

### **PRAYER**

Prayer is not the last thing your elementary student needs from you. In fact, it should be one of the priorities in the morning, and one of last things you do before you sleep.

Prayer is one of the over-arching themes of your entire elementary school parenting journey.

Unlike you, God sees all and knows all and hears all. When your student faces peer pressure, God can supply courage. When your student is anxious about a test, God can provide comfort and peace. When they are struggling with feelings or fears that they have not even shared or recognized, God can minister to their hurting hearts. And when you are feeling overwhelmed, unequipped, and absolutely heartbroken, God can give you wisdom and remind you that nothing is impossible for Him. You see, prayer is not just something your child needs from you. It is something you need, too.

*Heather Stoll has more than 20 years of ministry experience, predominantly in the area of communications and media. She has served churches in South Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee, alongside her husband, Jeff. Together, they have two children, and they currently reside in Saint Augustine, FL.*



# A Dad's To Do List

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BE CONSISTENT

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ENCOURAGE

ENGAGE

BE INVOLVED

MAKE A PRIORITY

PERMISSION TO REST

PERMISSION TO PLAY

BE A SAFE PLACE

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